

# **Audible.com and MP3 Player**

## **First Quarter Report 3/1/01 to 6/1/01**

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**History** Kalamazoo Public Library's first attempts at contacting Audible.com two years ago met with no response. Despite this initial disappointment, library director Saul Amdursky remained focused on his goal to experiment with digital audio to determine its viability as an alternative to cassette tape or CD audiobooks. A year ago, the director again contacted Audible.com, and calls and emails were very promptly returned. Negotiations followed, and Audible offered KPL the opportunity to loan its digital book titles to patrons via library-owned MP3 players.

Once the director loaded sample titles onto a Diamond Rio player the library had purchased for demonstration purposes, he actively promoted his idea inside and outside the library. As a result, we were awarded a grant from a local foundation, generated a gift from a sympathetic patron, and another gift was granted by the Friends of the Library.

With an initial bankroll of \$17,500, we began the project by purchasing 20 Diamond Rio 500 players. Through Audible.com, we paid \$100 per mp3 player; the price included a cassette adapter and in-ear headsets. (At the time of purchase, retail at Circuit City was \$175, not including the cassette adapter.) Choice of player was totally directed by Audible.com. We circulate the MP3 player, which comes in a protective slipcase, the cassette adapter and headphones in a durable nylon zippered bag.

**Contract** Our contract with Audible calls for us to spend \$6,000 between 3/1/01 and 2/28/02. Our initial agreement with Audible.com states that for each title, we are billed at the Audible list price multiplied by the number of simultaneous uses each title experiences. This system is an attempt to imitate purchase costs for multiple copies of print titles. We are still negotiating with Audible about the best way to track and pay for usage levels. Our initial agreement asked that we pay ten times the list price per title, based on the assumption that each title would experience no more than ten simultaneous circulations. It is quite possible that our final agreement will see Audible.com reimbursing the library retroactively. We have been very happy with the equipment sold to us by Audible.com; one MP3 player did malfunction and Audible did a 24-hour, no-questions-asked replacement.

**Implementation** A library-owned PC was designated for the sole purpose of managing the Audible downloads and transferring content to the Diamond Rio players. Automation staff installed and configured all software and updates, initialized the players for Audible.com to recognize them, and provided initial training to key members of the audiovisual staff. Those members then gave each remaining AV staff member individualized training on using Audible.com's homepage, the functions of the MP3 players, and detailed explanation of the library's MP3 player loan policy. Training took place over a three-week period.

At this time, only the library's central location circulates MP3 players; they must be both checked out and returned at the audiovisual desk. This limits the number of staff members who are handling the players to less than ten people. As a result, concern about keeping track of

players on return is kept to a minimum; when not in circulation, they're locked in a cabinet which has been keyed for storage at the AV desk.

Before we began loaning players to the public, we invited select patrons and staff to participate in a trial, evaluating the quality of the players and our policies and procedures. A base collection of digital book titles was established through the requests of the test group. This gave AV staff members some experience in purchasing, downloading and transferring titles to players while patrons waited and other desk functions were handled. Volunteers then responded to an evaluation, the results of which are summarized later in this document.

The loan period on MP3 players is two weeks. We do not offer renewals or reserves on the players, nor is a grace period in effect for late returns. At the time of checkout, patrons provide a Mastercard or Visa card number and sign an agreement authorizing the library to charge a replacement cost to their card if the player is not returned five business days after the due date. Overdue fines are \$1.00 a day until the fifth business day. Credit card numbers and agreement forms are filed in a log and safely locked away until the player is returned. There is a 24-hour waiting period in effect before another player can be checked out by the same patron.

**Title Selection** Because funds for purchasing digital titles are limited during this trial period, we have allowed title selection to be customer-driven. Audiovisual desk staff – none of whom are librarians, which contractually restricts their ability to make selection decisions for KPL - are authorized to purchase titles on demand within certain parameters. Currently, these require that a title is either 1) a current hardcover fiction or nonfiction NYTBS, 2) on Oprah's book club list, or 3) by one of 181 authors who are part of the KPL's "Book My Favorites" automatic reserve program. Titles not fitting these criteria must go through a request process that takes no longer than 48 hours; these requests are considered by Loan Services department head Terry Lason, whose librarian status allows him to make selection decisions outside the parameters of these criteria. At the time of the purchase download, staff fill out a form that alerts cataloging to the new title. All titles are cataloged, showing in the catalog as "digital books."

Empowering staff to make immediate purchases has been an important, if unorthodox, aspect of the MP3 experiment. Digital downloads have on more than one occasion been delivered to customers well in advance of our ability to serve print customers. John Grisham's *A Painted House* and Stephen King's *Dreamcatcher* were available digitally long before the audiotape versions arrived. Digital downloads also made certain titles available immediately when all other library copies were unavailable. A patron looking for P.D. James' *Death in Holy Orders* to determine if it would be a good selection for her book group found that all of our print copies were circulating. AV staff purchased the title, transferred it to an MP3 player and delivered it to a very happy patron (who just happened to be one of the library trustees).

**Publicity** Patrons are very curious about MP3 digital applications in a library setting, but few seem to know very much about the technology. A good plan of action for other libraries planning to offer MP3 technology would include lots of media coverage coupled with a staff ready to really market the product, both selling and teaching the technology.

The KPL marketing plan included local media releases (several newspaper articles and feature segments on television news), notices to the national media (*LJ*, *LJ Digital*, and *LJ's* quarterly tech magazine gave it some play), and in-house advertising. Interest in the players has been very much influenced by how much media coverage we are getting, so it's best to put some thought into developing a comprehensive advertising plan to get the word out. An informational mailing to patrons who are regular audiobook listeners would probably bring good results. Our very best marketing has been done by the AV staff who've let customers know by word of mouth.

**Feedback** Feedback from staff and patrons regarding the MP3 technology has been largely positive. Most comments concern sound quality. Most digital books are available in format 1, which is the most compressed sound quality. The Diamond Rio 500 MP3 player will hold approximately 28 hours of format 1 compressed sound, which is comparable to AM radio quality. (Though the players also accept format 4 downloads, KPL has yet to purchase and loan a title from Audible in this format.) Most patrons are happy to trade a slight reduction in sound quality for the added convenience, portability, and immediate availability of popular titles. While most patrons listen to the digital books through headphones, those who've used the car adapters have been able to hear selections clearly once they made proper adjustments on both car and player volume controls.

Patron feedback has played an important role in the creation of the library's instruction guide included with the player and accessories. Though the first guide the library issued was adequate in most instructions, patrons encountered confusion regarding the functions of the Rio player's browse button. Based on patrons' comments, the guide was revised and reissued; this reduced patrons' frustration substantially, and so far, there's been no need to issue a third draft.

**User Profile** The majority of our MP3 users have borrowed audiobooks in other formats. Most digital book patrons have become repeat borrowers who say they are sold on the convenience of the material format. Interestingly, the adapters to this technology tend to be middle-aged and older. Young people tend not to listen to audiobooks and are also largely unable to borrow MP3 players on their own because they lack a credit card for collateral, although there would be a lot of interest with our younger patrons if we ever begin using MP3 players to loan music.

**Future** Probably our most frequently asked question has been "can you transfer titles onto my own MP3 player if I bring it in?" Currently, this not only violates our agreement with Audible.com, but would also be problematic with the need for each player to be authorized and recognized by Audible. Audible.com is receptive to the concept of loaning to "foreign" MP3 players and it seems like the natural direction for this technology, if MP3 player ownership does become commonplace. Taking this notion one step further, it is easy to envision the convenience of logging onto KPL's website and transferring digital material to a privately-owned MP3 player from the comfort of home. Our patrons are coming up with these scenarios with no prompting from staff; one would hope that the technology and business agreements will be able to follow our patron's imaginations in relatively short order.

Library director Saul Amdursky feels that Audible.com has been one of the most responsive vendors he has ever worked with. The few difficulties experienced at the public desk, where the players are loaned, have been quickly remedied by very helpful Audible.com staff. The past three months have shown Audible.com's title selection growing substantially; one quickly gets the feeling that they are committed to growth and customer satisfaction. Because of their willingness to work with us reciprocally in forging new territory, our experience as their first institutional client has been a very positive one.

**We use these forms to alert cataloging that a new title has been purchased and needs to be added to the catalog, and also for patrons to request that items be purchased that are outside our “on demand” purchasing guidelines.**

### **Audible.com Materials—Patron Requests and Additions**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ ☐ Please Catalog This Title

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Abridged / Unabridged (circle one) Cost: \_\_\_\_\_

Patron Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Bar Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Evening Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

|                   |              |    |
|-------------------|--------------|----|
| Purchased         | Yes          | No |
| Date              | _____        |    |
| Initials          | _____        |    |
| Patron Contacted? | In Person    |    |
|                   | Left Message |    |

**At time of checkout, credit card imprint is taken and patron signs and dates this agreement. Both documents are kept until the player is returned on time and then are destroyed.**

I understand and agree that my Visa/Mastercard will be charged a replacement cost of \$220.00 if the MP3 player I have borrowed from the Kalamazoo Public Library has not been returned by five (5) business days after the due date. I also realize that my credit card may be charged for any components (MP3 player, headphones, car adapter, protective cases) that are not returned or are returned in a damaged condition.

I understand that the MP3 player and its components can ONLY be returned at the Audiovisual Desk (Central Library) during open hours of operation.

Equipment is inspected before each loan. I agree that all components are present at the time of checkout.

Patron Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**When a player is returned, the staff member checks off each of these components and functions in our logbook—insuring that the player is ready to be checked out by another patron before storing.**

|                      |                          |                       |                          |                     |   |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Date returned: _____ |                          | Staff initials: _____ |                          |                     |   |
| Components:          | <input type="checkbox"/> | Player & Case         | <input type="checkbox"/> | Car adapter         | <input type="checkbox"/> Discharge        |
|                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | Earphones             | <input type="checkbox"/> | Instruction booklet | <input type="checkbox"/> Change Batteries |
|                      |                          |                       |                          |                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Erase Contents   |

|                      |                          |                       |                          |                     |   |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Date returned: _____ |                          | Staff initials: _____ |                          |                     |   |
| Components:          | <input type="checkbox"/> | Player & Case         | <input type="checkbox"/> | Car adapter         | <input type="checkbox"/> Discharge        |
|                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | Earphones             | <input type="checkbox"/> | Instruction booklet | <input type="checkbox"/> Change Batteries |
|                      |                          |                       |                          |                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Erase Contents   |

### **To Transfer Digital Books to MP3 Player:**

- 1) Plug in the player and make sure previous contents have been emptied.
- 2) Click on “show transfer list” at center of upper tool bar.
- 3) Select a title, then drag and drop to “loading zone” box; repeat with all desired titles or until player is full. (To delete a title from the box, highlight and click “delete.”)
- 4) Record the titles that are being “checked out” on the MP3 clipboard. (Initially, we need to keep records of how many times each title is circulating.)
- 5) When the transfer list is complete, click “transfer.”
- 6) The player is now loaded with selections and ready to circulate.

### **To Purchase and Download Audible.com Titles:**

- 1) Check to make sure the title (or author) is on the approved list. (Only *book* titles by Book My Favorites authors may be purchased—no interviews, radio specials, etc.)
- 2) Go to “My Library” page and search for the book title you wish to download.
- 3) Click on “click out.”
- 4) Click “get it now” after the title you wish to purchase.
- 5) Select format 1 (if not already preselected).
- 6) Click download. (For an approximation of download time, 6 hours takes about 3 minutes.)
- 7) When download is complete, drop and drag the book to the “loading zone,” plug in the MP3 player and transfer.
- 8) Fill out the top portion of the “Patron Request for Audible.com Materials” and put it on the MP3 clipboard.

**\*\*It is essential that you fill out this slip! This is how we let cataloging know that they need to add this digital title to our catalog.**

### **Checking out MP3 Players to patrons:**

- 1) Make sure there is a player available.
- 2) You will need the patron’s library card, picture ID, and Mastercard or Visa.
- 3) Check status of patron’s library account (this is a good time to make certain we have the correct address, too.)



- 4) If library account is in good status, begin the transfer of digital books to the player. (Don't forget to record "checked out" books on the MP3 clipboard.)
- 5) While the transfer is taking place, take care of paperwork.
- 6) Run a credit card imprint and write on the charge slip "contingent security deposit for MP3 player #\_\_ to be returned by (date)."
- 7) Have patron sign credit card slip and give them the cardmember copy as a reminder.
- 8) Make certain that all components are in bag and have patron sign policy agreement.
- 9) File credit card slip and policy agreement in the corresponding MP3 player pocket of black logbook.
- 10) When download is finished, wand player onto the patron account.

**\*\*Make absolutely certain that patrons understand that the players may ONLY be returned to the AV desk!!!**

### **Discharging MP3 players:**

**\*\*While patron is still at the desk, visually inspect for return of all components.**

- 1) Get out logbook and turn to the log page for that particular player.
- 2) Check off all returned components.
- 3) If anything looks fishy, double check serial numbers.
- 4) Change battery and record that battery has been changed in logbook. (Put "spent" battery in used battery box in cabinet.)
- 5) Empty player of contents and record in logbook. To empty player, plug it in, go to "Devices," then "Erase Diamond Rio 500." This will delete ALL titles.
- 6) DO NOT forget to discharge player from patron record.
- 7) Date and initial your entry. When player is stored in cabinet, it should be ready for the next patron to check out.

## MP3 Player Evaluation

Thank you for taking a few moments to give us some feedback about the MP3 players and the loan process. Please feel free to add more comments on the back of this evaluation.

- 1) Did you feel that the sound quality of the MP3 player was adequate? How does it compare with listening to books on cassette?

Comparable, but less amplification

Essentially the same as books on tape

Tonal adjustment on MP3 would help in cases where reader is difficult to understand

Sound quality lacked the consistency of cassettes

- 2) Were you able to use the cassette adapter in your car or home stereo system?

No problems reported

- 3) Did you use the headphones the library provided or find it preferable to use your own?

Used both but library-provided headphones are less cumbersome

Didn't use—don't like the idea of sharing—would use my own if needed

No—found them awkward to use

- 4) Were the instructions we provided regarding the use of the player clear and helpful? Did you have difficulty with any aspect of using the player?

Control buttons are quite small

Instructions are necessary as operation is not self-evident

Difficulty understanding how to access second book selection

Rewind function tricky—kept ending up at beginning of section

Difficult to recognize from menu which is first “volume” of multi-volume book

Referred to instructions for setting bookmarks and to scroll through the book

- 5) Were you satisfied with the book selection available to you from the library and Audible.com? If no, how would you like to see selection improved?

More titles

Initially, selections seemed varied—could be broadly expanded in future

MUSIC!! (Books available in other formats, but music is better suited to the technology)

Limited selection is understandable as a pilot program

Add titles based on user requests

6) Were you able to listen to all your selections during the two-week loan period?

Most responded yes

No, second book would not advance to final tracks

No, I didn't care for the sound quality and quit

Yes, but at times my schedule would prevent me from finishing a book in two weeks

7) Are there any aspects of checking out or returning the players that you feel could be improved?

Not every patron has or would be willing to use their credit card as security

Having your credit card run every time will be a pain

The credit card requirement made me very uncomfortable

8) Would you check out an MP3 player from Kalamazoo Public Library again?

Yes—75%

No—25%

Ultimately a frustrating experience

Battery died in the middle of the first book

Player malfunction was frustrating (would not advance to final tracks)

## TITLES OWNED BY KPL AND NUMBERS OF CIRCS PER MONTH

| TITLES                           | 3/1/01 | 4/1/01 | 5/1/01 | 6/1/01 | 7/1/01 | 8/1/01 | 9/1/01 | 10/1/01 |
|----------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
|                                  |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |         |
| Airframe                         |        |        | 1      | 2      |        |        |        |         |
| Blind Assassin—Part I            | 2      | 3      | 4      | 7      |        |        |        |         |
| Blind Assassin—Part II           | 2      | 3      | 4      | 7      |        |        |        |         |
| Brethren                         |        |        | 1      | 2      |        |        |        |         |
| Bridget Jones's Diary            |        |        |        | 2      |        |        |        |         |
| Camelot Caper                    |        | 4      | 5      | 5      |        |        |        |         |
| Darkness More than Night—Part I  | 3      | 5      | 5      | 6      |        |        |        |         |
| Darkness More than Night—Part II | 3      | 5      | 5      | 6      |        |        |        |         |
| Death in Holy Orders—Part I      |        |        |        | 1      |        |        |        |         |
| Death in Holy Orders—Part II     |        |        |        | 1      |        |        |        |         |
| Double Deuce                     |        | 2      | 3      | 3      |        |        |        |         |
| Dreamcatcher—Part I              |        | 1      | 3      | 6      |        |        |        |         |
| Dreamcatcher—Part II             |        | 1      | 4      | 7      |        |        |        |         |
| Dreamcatcher—Part III            |        | 1      | 4      | 7      |        |        |        |         |
| Drowning Ruth                    |        | 0      | 2      | 2      |        |        |        |         |
| Fast Food Nation                 |        |        |        | 1      |        |        |        |         |
| Firm                             | 0      | 0      | 1      | 1      |        |        |        |         |
| First Counsel—Part I             | 3      | 6      | 7      | 9      |        |        |        |         |
| First Counsel—Part II            | 3      | 6      | 7      | 9      |        |        |        |         |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> to Die           |        |        |        | 2      |        |        |        |         |
| Green Mile                       | 1      | 1      | 1      | 1      |        |        |        |         |
| Hades Factor                     |        |        | 1      | 2      |        |        |        |         |
| An Hour Before Daylight          | 2      | 2      | 2      | 6      |        |        |        |         |
| Legends                          |        |        | 2      | 3      |        |        |        |         |
| Looking Back                     |        |        |        | 1      |        |        |        |         |
| Mother of Pearl—Part I           |        |        |        | 1      |        |        |        |         |
| Mother of Pearl—Part II          |        |        |        | 1      |        |        |        |         |
| Murder on the Yellow Brick Road  |        |        | 1      | 1      |        |        |        |         |
| Nothing Like it in the World     | 2      | 4      | 5      | 6      |        |        |        |         |
| Painted House—Part I             |        | 8      | 16     | 18     |        |        |        |         |
| Painted House—Part II            |        | 8      | 16     | 18     |        |        |        |         |
| Pastime                          |        | 2      | 3      | 4      |        |        |        |         |
| River Cross My Heart             |        | 1      | 1      | 1      |        |        |        |         |
| Sanctuary Sparrow                |        | 3      | 3      | 3      |        |        |        |         |
| Seabiscuit                       |        |        |        | 2      |        |        |        |         |
| Sheba                            |        |        | 2      | 2      |        |        |        |         |

|                                |         |         |         |         |  |  |  |  |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--|--|--|--|
| Street Lawyer                  | 2       | 3       | 6       | 6       |  |  |  |  |
| Team Rodent                    |         |         | 4       | 7       |  |  |  |  |
| Testament—Part I               |         |         | 1       | 2       |  |  |  |  |
| Testament—Part II              |         |         | 1       | 2       |  |  |  |  |
| Testament—Part III             |         |         | 1       | 2       |  |  |  |  |
| Timeline—Part I                |         | 1       | 2       | 2       |  |  |  |  |
| Timeline—Part II               |         | 1       | 2       | 2       |  |  |  |  |
| Violin                         |         |         |         | 1       |  |  |  |  |
| White on White                 | 3       | 3       | 3       | 3       |  |  |  |  |
| Wish You Well                  |         |         | 1       | 1       |  |  |  |  |
|                                |         |         |         |         |  |  |  |  |
| <b>TOTAL # OF PLAYER CIRCS</b> |         | 31      | 48      | 68      |  |  |  |  |
| <b>TOTAL # OF TITLES OWNED</b> | 9       | 18      | 27      | 35      |  |  |  |  |
| <b>TOTAL # OF TITLE CIRCS</b>  | 26      | 74      | 130     | 184     |  |  |  |  |
| <b>TOTAL \$ COST (x 10)</b>    | \$2,833 | \$3,621 | \$5,437 | \$6,973 |  |  |  |  |
|                                |         |         |         |         |  |  |  |  |
|                                |         |         |         |         |  |  |  |  |
|                                |         |         |         |         |  |  |  |  |